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SUBJECT: GEN PETRAEUS AND KUWAITI DCOS ON IRAN, IRAQ, CT,
YEMEN AND JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES

REF: KUWAIT 724

Classified By: DCM Tom Williams for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (S) CENTCOM Commander GEN David Petraeus, accompanied by Ambassador, engaged in a wide-ranging exchange on the evening of July 22 with Kuwaiti Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS) LTG Ahmed Khalid Al Sabah. Key Points:

-- (C) On Iraq, General Petraeus said the USG appreciates Kuwait's robust aid for our Iraq efforts; Kuwait's security remains a top U.S. priority, and we will coordinate closely on force outflows from Iraq. The U.S. forces relied on support from Kuwait for our efforts in Afghanistan as well. Kuwait should remain open to engagement with Iraq as a means to help resolve disputes between the two countries and help Iraq achieve greater stability. DCOS Al Sabah responded that Kuwait seeks to rebuild relations with Iraq and prefers that negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait on international disputes be under the UN aegis.

-- (S) On Iran, Kuwait's head of Military Intelligence said the fate of Iran is in Supreme Leader Khamene'i's hands. He must either compromise with Ayatollah Rafsanjani or continue to support President Ahmadinejad. He assessed that the public had crossed the "fear line," and continued protests against the government were a possibility. He thought it would be important to see the Supreme Leader's response to protests. Continued unrest and government repression may be the catalyst that provokes Iranian security forces to crack down, align with the masses, or fracture.

-- (C) On CT, General Petraeus noted USG appreciation for recent CT actions by Kuwait's Interior Ministry forces, and said passage of comprehensive anti-terror legislation would greatly facilitate further efforts.

-- (C) General Petraeus characterized the bilateral security relationship as strong, and welcomed the upcoming Joint Military Commission (JMC) in October, as well as Kuwait's continued participation in joint military exercises.

Iraq

12. (C) GEN Petraeus thanked the GOK for its support for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and its facilitation of U.S. forces deploying and redeploying through Kuwait. He provided his congratulations on the results of the recent Parliamentary elections, noting in particular the election of four U.S.-educated women, and said that it was encouraging to see Kuwait's recent counter-terrorism progress. Petraeus also thanked the GOK for its financial, reconstruction, and moral support for Iraq during OIF. He urged that the GOK continue to remain open to negotiate disputes between Iraq

and Kuwait, and hoped that such negotiations would be concluded successfully. He assessed that with assistance from its Arab neighbors Iraq would "muddle through" towards stability. Though establishing Iraqi stability absorbs a great amount of USG focus, he reassured the DCOS that Kuwaiti security would remain a priority for the U.S., and also promised that the U.S. would closely coordinate with the GOK on working through the logistics of support for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq through Kuwait. GEN Petraeus said Iraqi PM Maliki's visit to Washington would provide an opportunity for discussion on issues of concern to Kuwait, such as compensation, borders, and recovering the remains of Kuwaiti prisoners still missing from the 1990 invasion and Iraqi occupation. General Petraeus briefed the DCOS on levels of violence in Iraq, noting that the surge of US forces, fighting side-by-side with Iraqi forces that now number nearly 650,000, has contributed greatly to growing stability. U.S. combat forces have completed their withdrawal from Iraqi cities, although advisors and liaison elements remain along with joint coordination centers in Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul that provide the Iraqis with access to U.S. enablers and expertise.

13. (C) In response, the DCOS -- who was personally held as a POW during the Iraqi invasion -- expressed a desire to rebuild relations with Iraq, but, echoing the policy of the GOK, said that all Kuwaiti-concerned negotiations with Iraq should be conducted under the auspices of the UN. GEN Petraeus informed him, that in a recent conversation with Vice President Biden, he recommended that former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Staffan de Mistura adjudicate the Iraq/Kuwait dispute.

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Iran

14. (S) BG Abdulrahman al-Hadhood, Chief of Kuwaiti Military Intelligence, in a frank discussion on Iran, asserted that the future of Iran, and its relations with its regional neighbors, is in the hands of Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Khamene'i. The direction in which Khamene'i will lead Iran in this post-presidential election era will largely depend on whether he forges a compromise with Ayatollah Ali Akbar Rafsanjani or continues to pull the "puppet strings" of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Al-Hadhood said the Iranian public, in staging mass protests in the wake of the elections, had "crossed the fear line." The next test for Iran will be to face the future reactions of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and to what extent the IRGC, the Basij militia, and the regular army are ordered to maintain security. He questioned whether the IRGC would hold ranks with Khamene'i or begin to sympathize with the Iranian masses should further crackdowns be instigated, as happened with the Iranian Army when it fractured and many joined the mass student protests in the 1979 Islamic revolution. Al-Hadhood predicted that such a tripwire to tip the balance would be the arrest of Presidential challenger Mir Housein Mousavi. The DCOS also mentioned Kuwaiti understanding that Iran was supporting Shi'a in the Gulf and extremists in Yemen. GEN Petraeus asked for assistance in determining if Iran was, in particular, supporting the al-Houthi in Yemen.

15. (S) GEN Petraeus assured the DCOS that the US military is "very capable" and is fully prepared for various contingencies should unrest escalate or Iran become more unpredictable. He added that the US military is assisting Gulf states in shoring up ballistic missile and counter air defenses, as well as early warning systems in the eventuality of an Iranian missile launch. He encouraged the GOK to consider establishing a regional "Center for Excellence for Air and Missile Defense," -- complementing the UAE's Gulf Air Warfare Center -- which would focus on air and missile defense and on the interoperability of systems such as the PAC-III Kuwait now has deployed.

Counterterrorism

16. (S) GEN Petraeus congratulated the DCOS on the success of GOK security forces in counterterrorism (CT) operations in recent months, citing Kuwaiti crackdowns on individuals of "mutual concern." He conveyed to the DCOS that passage of comprehensive CT legislation would greatly facilitate further cooperation in this critical area. General Petraeus observed that Kuwait, based on its experience with extremists, should recognize that such elements will ultimately turn to targeting Kuwait.

Mil-Mil: Joint training and JMC

17. (C) GEN Petraeus told the DCOS that the bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement (signed in 1991, renewed in 2001) had proved mutually beneficial and that the USG is inclined to renew it in 2011. He also said that he was looking forward to the October JMC to discuss with Kuwaiti COS LTG Fahad al-Amir Kuwaiti concerns over the FMS program and the possibility of creating a regional air and missile defense center of excellence in Kuwait. He also noted the receipt and approval of a Kuwaiti request for an avionics and weapon systems upgrade, and encouraged Kuwaiti participation in joint military exercises like Eager Mace and Bright Star. He also offered to help in the coordination of an Eagle Resolve exercise, should the GOK desire to host it. In addition, he encouraged Kuwait to send its special operations forces to Jordan's King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center and its fighter-attack aircraft to the UAE's Gulf Air Warfare Training Center.

18. (U) GEN Petraeus has cleared this cable.

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